
The Dynamics of Soviet Society. by W. W. Rostow; A Study of Bolshevism. by Nathan Leites
Review by: Paul Willen

American Slavic and East European Review, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Feb., 1955), pp. 138-142

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2491917>

Accessed: 11/02/2015 19:21

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Slavic and East European Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

process of continual adjustment, of correcting correctives? What is the balance sheet (not just a catalogue) of cohesion and division in Soviet society? Categorical answers to these questions are, of course, impossible to get. An analytical history, however, ought at least to make a stab at developing some of these issues to the limit of existing knowledge. Of this there is but the faintest evidence in the *Dynamics of Soviet Society*.

Confined to an interpretive essay of article length, Mr. Rostow's observations might well have proved interesting or stimulating. In their present form, they suffer terribly from the lack of sustaining substance. It is doubtful whether this effort, which the author among other things considers a pioneering venture in "making a frame for the dynamic analysis of societies such that the whole area of knowledge can be made greater than the sum of its specialized parts," comes anywhere near its mark. Rather the "whole area of knowledge" as presented here assumes somewhat more modest proportions than the information conveyed by any one of several specialized works of less ambitious scope. The glaring gap between promise and fulfillment which, as Mr. Rostow notes, is an important cause of disillusionment and dissatisfaction in the Soviet Union, entails similar consequences in the case of his book.

PAUL E. ZINNER

W. W. ROSTOW, *The Dynamics of Soviet Society*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1953. 282 pp. \$3.95.

NATHAN LEITES, *A Study of Bolshevism*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953. 639 pp. \$6.50.

Two new books on Bolshevism; two elaborate efforts to determine, once and for all, what makes the Kremlin tick; two extended memoranda for the guidance of those men who formulate American policy toward the Soviet Union.

These two volumes are not the first of this genre, and certainly they are not the last. But they constitute two particularly interesting products of American scholarship—the first, Rostow's work, because it encourages one to think that the volume of research conducted in our centers of learning since World War II has not been in vain, and the second, Leites' study, because it underlines the degree to which so much superb talent has been wasted in these efforts to understand Russia.

The enormous contrast between these two books, in both approach and conclusions, brings into sharp focus the confusion that still reigns in American thinking with regard to the Soviet Union. Were it not for the fact that both authors make frequent reference to men they call Lenin and Stalin one might well imagine that the two works describe entirely unrelated social movements!

Neither Rostow nor Leites draws a flattering picture of Soviet society;

but the resemblance between the two pictures ends right there. Where Rostow is concerned with the inner workings of a complex and changing social order, Leites is immersed in an erudite effort to psychoanalyze the constant and unchanging personality of Bolshevism. Where Rostow sees men and movements being shaped by large historical forces, Leites sees men and movements shaping history to suit their own peculiar psychological needs. Where Rostow sees an emerging totalitarian system, Leites sees only an incredible psychological nightmare.

There is hardly a single point at which the two books are in agreement; and yet both are designed to prepare America for coming struggles and dilemmas.

Leites' enormous volume is largely composed of quotations from Lenin, Stalin and the nineteenth-century Russian literary giants. The quotations are interspersed with Leites' careful explanations of the relationship of one quotation to another, so that the reader is not lost in the quotational avalanche he has prepared, and so that the rigid system of thought and emotion which he has brought together does not escape the reader's attention. Lenin said in 1902 . . . Stalin said in 1935 . . . Lenin said in 1921 . . . the treatment rather resembles that of a fundamentalist tract, with a biblical citation to suit each turn of the argument.

From the interminable flow of quotations the reader is supposed to grasp the essential dogmas of what Leites calls the "operational code of the Politbureau," and by this he means the rules of behavior by which the neurosis known as Bolshevism adjusts itself to the outside world. In his view, Bolshevism is nothing more nor less than a very special type of pathological condition which places upon its followers a series of demands. All Bolsheviks, at all times, are motivated by this peculiar psychology, whether they are sitting at a Kremlin conference table, directing a Siberian slave labor camp, attending a leftist Hollywood soirée in the 1930's, organizing workers for the Mine, Mill and Smelter's Union, fighting French soldiers in the ricefields of Indo-China, or storming the barricades of the Winter Palace.

Leites is not especially clear as to the exact nature of the mental affliction which produced and guides this international movement. A politician under its spell, however, is determined to avert what Leites terms the "ever-present danger of annihilation"; he is driven to fulfill "omnipotence fantasies"; he is haunted by the terrible "fear of goal-fulfillment"; he continuously strives to overcome "a devastating guilt and shame"; he finds it necessary to compensate for many unspecified "anxieties"; and he is threatened by an omnipresent "fear of death."

The Communist movement, then, is a vast conspiracy designed to saturate the unique emotional needs of its diseased leadership; Communism is the expression of this disease and it develops in accord with the "delight," "aversion," and "anxieties" which this disease produces.

The vast structure of axioms and postulates which Leites has put together on the foundations of these primitive psychological insights is indeed very imposing and runs well over 600 pages of exceedingly

close type. It is a gigantic intellectual edifice, but whether it has much relevance to modern Russia is very doubtful.

Indeed, Leites himself finds it difficult to live in the intellectual edifice he has constructed. When it comes to drawing concrete conclusions, Leites is forced to leave his magnificent work and turn to the same kind of guesswork and calculation which less pretentious analysts engage in daily. This is clearly illustrated in the first chapter of his book, "The Politburo and the West," in which he tries to interpret some of the strategy of the Cold War. What is striking about this chapter is the similarity of his conclusions—barred of the awesome language in which they are clothed—to those advanced in our daily press. He explains, for example, that the Bolsheviks will advance in the global struggle only when they are confident of victory, and will only take risks when, should their calculations prove faulty, they can make an orderly retreat. "Retreat," he observes after considerable meditation and a few historical analogies, "is required when standing fast threatens annihilation in view of the enemy's superior force." He summarizes this philosophy—which he treats as one peculiar to Bolshevik mentality—with the declaration that "if the Politburo aims at world domination, it is also determined to play it safe." His discussion of Moscow's failure to use military force to crush Tito after the 1948 break, and his analysis of the ending of the Berlin blockade in the same year, are placed in the framework of this extraordinarily prosaic deduction.

The dangers in an analysis such as Leites' are two-fold: First, that many people, less sophisticated than Leites himself, may take it seriously and try to apply the Bolshevik "omnipotence fantasy" to practical situations, with disastrous results. Second, that those who are sophisticated enough to disregard his analysis in drawing conclusions still are under the impression that the conclusions are based upon such an imposing substructure of thought, and therefore gain from this impression a false sense of security. In the present atmosphere, intellectual games such as Leites plays enjoy a great vogue; but such games are played at the expense of the millions who yearn for an honest answer to the terrible questions posed by Soviet totalitarianism.

Rostow's book on the other hand is just such a volume as these millions might find useful; it poses the crucial questions with great precision and attempts to answer them with honesty and a minimum of intellectual claptrap. In this reviewer's opinion, it is the best and most lucid overall picture of Soviet society that has appeared. Much of its success derives from the fact that Rostow was able to select, with great discrimination, the most significant material from the already-published primary research of scholars at the Russian Research Center and elsewhere. To some extent, therefore, the entire profession of Soviet experts may take pride in his work; but the synthesis of the many books is Rostow's, and for this he alone deserves credit.

Unlike Leites' book, which is personal and dogmatic, Rostow's work is written with detachment and moderation. There are very few cate-

gorical statements, and most of his conclusions are hedged with the proper amount of caution.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons for Rostow's relative objectivity is that his analysis deals largely with institutions rather than personalities. He examines the Soviet system as a series of developing, interacting social organisms, colored by traditions and ideologies, but with a life and inertia of their own, composed of people who are as much molded by these institutions as molders of them.

Rostow is acutely conscious of the degree to which the abstract ideals of the 1917 Revolution have become ritualized into meaninglessness by the Soviet bureaucracy which came to power in the 1920's and 1930's with rules of its own. Therefore, he doesn't begin his analysis with the abstractions of Bolshevik philosophy, but with the concrete realities of Soviet institutional life and the philosophy implicit in those realities. He is concerned with the interplay of the forces which produced these institutions, the different layers of bureaucratic consciousness, and the slow accumulation of experiences which, over the years, produce important historical changes. He tends to view the vast ideological morass in which Leites' whole book is mired as the verbal rationale for the Soviet system rather than its working inspiration, and he writes:

All available evidence points to the domination of Stalin's mind and that of his colleagues by an ideology derived from their own experience in the pursuit and maintenance of power. Its effective touchstones of good and bad are the consequences of any given act for their own power . . . Nevertheless, the leaders may still believe, in some part of their being, that they represent correctly the Marxist heritage. They most certainly are loyal to the institutions they have built in Russia and take pride in the material progress of the society to whose guidance and control they have devoted their mature lives. And this institutional loyalty may be associated, in no very strict way, with their ideological heritage. They may thus have successfully and, in some sense, sincerely, identified their own success as a ruling group in Russia with the ultimate goals of Communism.

This explanation of the relation between implicit power and explicit ideology contains all the subtlety and caution which this subject deserves. There are many other equally incisive passages in the book.

The Soviet ruling class, in Rostow's portrayal, is not made up of irrational psychopaths but rather of extremely tough and cynical administrators of men and ideas. The system they operate is not the product of fanatical or demented personalities driven by "omnipotence fantasies" but rather of several decades of the ruthless struggle for the establishment of an authoritarian and industrialized social order.

Rostow is impervious to the clichés and catchwords which pass for explanations of the USSR in so many quarters, and this shows up everywhere in the book. Instructive in this respect is his assessment of the influence of Russian history on the Soviet present. He rejects both the view that the Soviet Union is nothing more than a modernized version

of Tsarist Russia and the view that the two empires have nothing in common. The continuity between Stalinist and Tsarist Russia derives, he says, not so much from the endurance of Tsarist traditions or the eternal Russian spirit, but from the fact that both governments have had to govern the same land mass. Since they both faced many of the same social and economic problems, they devised some of the same solutions to them.

Rostow's tools of analysis—empirical, sociological and practical—are reliable and produce fruitful results wherever he turns them. The book was completed in the spring of 1953, in the months following Stalin's death. Yet one is astonished to see how well Rostow understood the implications of Stalin's death for the internal power structure, implications which many of his colleagues have only begun to appreciate.

In his summary Rostow emphasizes the growing bureaucratization of the Soviet state, and frames his analysis of the post-Stalin crisis in these terms. His reference to the "dilution of the executive authority and the assertion of a degree of autonomy on the part of the bureaucratic chains of command" after Stalin's death has proven to be prophetic.

For those who want easy solutions and pat answers Rostow's conclusions will not, of course, prove congenial reading. But those who want the most basic kind of preparation for tomorrow's headlines might do well to read this volume, if they have any time left after plowing through the monumental erudition of Leites' great compendium.

PAUL WILLEN

Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy, a series of essays selected and translated with an introduction by George L. Kline. New York: Humanities Press, 1952. vii + 190 pp. \$5.00.

This volume brings together, in English translation, seven essays on Spinoza written between 1923 and 1932 by Soviet philosophers. They make interesting reading, and throw valuable light on Soviet approaches to the history of philosophy in general and to Spinoza's thought in particular.

These papers afford renewed exemplification of the fact that, although Soviet scholars are committed to a definite philosophy, they by no means lack interest in the history of the subject. Nor, evidently, is this interest confined to a desire to refute the errors of all the unbelievers, as if the pursuit of philosophy were construed as a single contest to find the one eternally correct answer to a static set of abstract problems. While there is a great deal of polemics in the writings of Soviet philosophers (both among themselves and in relation to the infidel world) the very nature of their dialectical methodology leads them to try to assess everything, including philosophical schools and doctrines, in the light of the evolutionary *trends* involved, in terms of the rate and direction of changes taking place. Such an approach also leads to an investigation of the connections of whatever is being studied